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Sent: Wednesday, December 08, 2004 5:20 PM
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Cc: Giancarlo, Angela E.
Subject: Rural Health Care Support
Importance: High

I understand there's a good possibility that the long-delayed order regarding rural health care support for insular territories is likely to be on the agenda for next week's Commission meeting. (I'm enclosing a copy of the ex parte that we used in meetings with many of you a few months ago regarding this item.) On behalf of the American Samoa Telecommunications Authority, I wanted to remind you of the importance of this proceeding to our client and to the people of American Samoa, and to strongly encourage you to keep this item on track.

In particular, given the relatively small scope of the additional support under discussion (potentially affecting telecommunications and Internet usage by only about six to ten health care facilities in four small insular territories), I also wanted to encourage you to provide enough support so that the federal rural telemedicine support policy makes a significant difference. For example, the rules should provide that each health care facility qualifies for the same discount levels as schools and libraries in the same communities, up to a maximum discount of 80%. By adopting such a rule, the Commission would go a long way toward making the benefits of telemedicine a reality for the residents of these relatively poor, isolated territories. Applying the same discount levels as those in the e-rate program would also make the rural health care support plan relatively simple to administer (for example, health care facilities in these territories would be able to join with schools and libraries in consortia to purchase these services). By contrast, underfunding this program by providing inadequate discounts would undermine the public interest benefits that the program is certain to bring.

I realize you have been quite busy and inundated by ex parte advocacy on other issues, but wanted to make sure that this proceeding is not overlooked. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me.

Thanks very much.

--David Sieradzki
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